

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS  
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NICARAGUA/>UTLEY: And so that real war faces a serious escalation. <  
>FIGHTING>Nicaragua may not have gotten MiG jet fighters from the Soviet Union, but it is receiving helicopter gunships, and today an American official said that with the new weapons, 'the Sandinistas could blow the rebels out of the country.' That's a quote. The rebels, the contras, were of course financed by the United States until Congress stopped the money. But as Fred Francis reports now, they are still fighting. In fact, they are growing.

FRANCIS: This is the cadence of a counterrevolution, of a Nicaraguan rebel army which did not collapse when CIA funding ended five months ago. The opposite has happened. Thousands of Nicaraguan peasants and students are quitting the Marxist regime and following rebels, known as contras, into the training camps of northern Nicaragua. They arrived hungry and tattered and disenchanted with the Sandinista revolution. Eighteen-year-old \*Christian came to the mountain training camp two weeks ago. She was once a model student sent to study in Cuba. She says there is a growing movement to overthrow Nicaraguan communism. \*CHRISTIAN (translated by unidentified woman): There is no freedom of expression. For students, the treatment is bad. There is forced recruitment and a shortage of food. It is bad.

FRANCIS: So bad that, according to intelligence analysts, in the past month the rebel ranks have grown by 50 percent, from 10,000 to almost 15,000. Many are peasants, like these who came last Thursday. Fourteen-year-old \*Adrian picked up a Russian machine gun in a battle along the way. Most brought only contempt for the Sandinista system. Some joining for economic reasons--losing a chicken, a pig, a house--poor, angry men. Others came for political reasons. (Francis translates for unidentified man) He said, 'Whoever is not part of the Sandinista organization cannot even work and has no rights at all.' That anger has filled the rebel camps, although there is less money to support them. The rebels had a \$80 million CIA budget until last summer. On their own, they've raised only \$2 million. The volunteers train in the rags they came in, with rifles that don't shoot. The commanders complain that these men will remain in the camp weeks after their training, waiting for weapons and ammunition. The end of CIA money and control forced the Nicaraguan rebels to arm themselves, scratching for bargains on the worldwide black market, appealing to right-wing Americans and going to anticommunist

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governments. It's been a real struggle for survival. With the Soviets now sending attack helicopters to Nicaragua, rebel leader Adolfo Calero warns of an escalation of the war, saying that he'll order his men to destroy sugar mills and refineries, if necessary. ADOLFO CALERO (rebel leader): We hereby serve notice to the Sandinista regime that if they use those helicopters against the Nicaraguan people, we will and we have the capability to attack targets that we have previously avoided.

FRANCIS: While the Sandinistas mobilize their forces, the new rebel volunteers wait in the mountain camps, believing that their country, Nicaragua, stands at the edge of an all-out civil war. Fred Francis, NBC News, on the Nicaraguan border.